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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of correctional institutions and institutions of higher education (community and junior colleges, postsecondary vocational-technical schools as well as 4-year colleges and universities) are involved in providing prisoner/students educational opportunities to help prisoners (1) establish new personal and social contacts, (2) examine alternative life styles, and (3) acquire education and training credentials in order to enhance job opportunities. A number of federally funded demonstration projects and assistance programs have encouraged such activity. In 1975 in the Federal system, 3,000 prisoner/students enrolled in college courses. They earned 179 college degrees, 158 two-year degrees, 19 baccalaureate degrees, and two Master's degrees in that year. Estimates are that from 1% to 5% (2,500 to 12,500) of all U. S. prisoners are enrollees in some form of higher education. (WL)

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Beyond The Barred Door *

Many diverse higher education programs seek to intervene positively with offenders at various points in the criminal justice process. Some programs direct their efforts to intervention on a pre-trial or pre-commitment basis; others try to provide educational services during incarceration, while still others provide post-release opportunities for higher education for offenders.

An increasing number of correctional institutions and institutions of higher education (community and junior colleges, postsecondary vocational-technical schools as well as four-year colleges and universities) are involved in such programs.

While each programs is different all share the common goals of offering prisoner/students the opportunity and means 1) to establish new personal and social contacts, 2) to examine alternative life

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styles, and 3) to acquire education and training credentials in order to enhance job opportunities; all in the hope that a non-criminal life style will replace the offender's former one.

The U. S. Office of Education (USOE) has supported a variety of experimental/demonstration projects designed to provide such opportunities. The Teacher Corps program offers offenders higher education opportunities during incarceration both on an "inside" and on a study-release basis. In addition, selected offenders are identified as learning facilitators and are assigned, on a paid-for basis, to work with other prisoners to upgrade their education levels. This combination of learning and earning plus continuation of Teacher Corps project involvement after release incorporates significant supportive factors which have been relatively successful.

USOE's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) has funded Offender Assistance Through Education, a project currently in operation in three pilot locations, Jacksonville, Florida, Denver, Colorado and Charlotte, North Carolina. A national project office

located in the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Washington, D. C., coordinates the efforts of the three sites. The project goal is to offer judges alternatives to incarceration for first felony offenders. Community colleges are offered as pre-trial diversion resources. "The goals of the program are to provide full educational, occupational and human services assistance to referrals in an effort to break criminal career cycles; to develop collaborative relationships between the colleges and criminal justice agencies.....; to encourage colleges to develop other programs for clients and employees of the justice system; and to develop program models."

The University of Massachusetts program which involves a county jail and the University demonstrates another way in which higher education can serve corrections. Staff as well as offenders are involved in higher education programs and the jail itself is used as an education center. The community-at-large is also involved in this program. By involving not only the offender and staff but the community also, all

become involved in the change process which has as its goals, upgrading the jail and increasing rapport between the community, jail staff and offenders.

Antioch College through its correctional education program is trying to involve prisoners and staff in University Without Walls undergraduate and graduate programs. A special effort is being made to provide highly individualized degree programs to people who could not otherwise enroll in higher education programs, either because of the location of the correctional institution or priority commitments of the potential student.

There has been a significant increase in college level enrollments by offenders due in part to the availability of Basic Education Opportunity Grants, Veteran's Educational Benefits as well as federally insured low-interest loans and work-study grants to finance their postsecondary education.

In the federal system alone during 1975 there were approximately 9,000 enrollments in college level courses involving an estimated 3,000 federal prisoners.

Federal prisoners earned 179 college degrees during the same year; 158 two-year degrees; 19 baccalaureate degrees; and 2 master degrees. There are no precise figures of the number of prisoners in the United States currently involved in postsecondary education programs; it is estimated that the number ranges from somewhere between 1% and 5% of all prisoners, or roughly between a low of 2,500 and a possible high of 12,500.

Post release linkages between the offender/student and a specific educational institution are very important parts of any correctional education delivery system. This linkage to be effective must include counseling, identification of sources for financial support, positive peer group contacts and other support services, as required.

The diversion of people from criminal activities through involvement in education is a cost-effective alternative and one which has long range implications for a significant number of offenders.

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